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SUBJECT: ATTIAH AND MASHHADANI STAND BY MALIKI, OPTIMISTIC
ON NEXT COR SESSION

Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller for reaons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In separate April 3 conversations with Polcouns, COR Speaker Mahmoud al-Mashhadani and COR Deputy Speaker Sheikh Khalid al-Attiyah both proclaimed their support for PM Maliki's government. Attiyah stated that all Sadrists had ties to Iran, while Mashhadani offered a more nuanced view, explaining that the Sadrists were reacting to years of neglect by the central government. Both parliamentary leaders recognized the importance of preserving legislative momentum and addressing key legislation, including the passage of an Elections Law. Mashhadani and Attiyah were also both receptive to offers of assistance from the U.S. Embassy's Constitutional and Legislative Affairs unit (CLA). End Summary.

Attiyah: UIA is firm and unified

¶2. (C) Attiyah proclaimed that the UIA was "firm, unified, with one vision," noting that the Kurds and even Tawafuq were supporting PM Maliki. He said he expected Sadr attempts to force through a vote of no-confidence but called it a "desperate, failing effort." Attiyah rejected the notion that the Basrah offensive, occurring immediately before the April congressional testimony, was poorly timed. Instead, he said, it strengthened the position of the government and demonstrated a new resolve to enforce law and order. Attiyah agreed that there were different strands within the Sadr movement and that the GOI should pursue a dialogue with moderates. "But in general," he added, "all the parts of the Sadr movement share something: their relationship with Iran." Attiyah speculated that the goal of Iran was to put pressure on the U.S. by supporting the Sadrists as a Hezbollah-style movement and called this strategy "unacceptable." When Polcouns noted that intra-Shia violence was not in Iran's interests, Attiyah agreed but admitted he "couldn't fully understand" Iran's intentions. Attiyah predicted there would be no moves towards regions formation after the law went into effect on April 11.

¶3. (C) Attiyah agreed there were many important laws facing the COR. He said the COR was still waiting for a draft of the elections law and speculated that the COR would "maybe be allowed" to hold a reading on hydrocarbons legislation. Attiyah predicted that the next week of the COR would be devoted to a discussion of the Basrah crises. Attiyah welcomed the proposed assistance from the Political Section's Constitutional and Legislative Affairs (CLA) unit and asked to see the proposed "course catalogue" of training offered to MPs as well as the U.S. report of political issues that should be resolved prior to the final drafting of an elections law.

Mashhadani: "Awed" by PM Maliki's bravery

¶4. (C) Mashhadani praised PM Maliki as his "old friend from the resistance." While conceding that Maliki has some faults - "Is he a smart leader? No. Is he a professional leader? No." - the speaker proclaimed himself "awed" by Maliki's bravery, noting that Maliki was willing to confront the Sadrists and stayed in Basrah to direct operations despite the great risk to his life. Mashhadani noted that several politicians, including Adil Abdel Mehdi and Ayad Allawi, were conspiring to replace Maliki but said they were "mistaken" and announced his personal support for the PM, "at least until October 1." Asked about the meeting of PCNS scheduled for April 6, Mashhadani caustically noted that it was meeting "too late," saying that he was "annoyed and sad" that President Talabani did nothing to help PM Maliki during the recent crisis. "I will try to cooperate," he said, "but we will just sit around and drink coffee and talk" during the PCNS.

¶5. (C) Maliki said he was developing different strategies to deal with national issues, including Sunni outreach and reconstruction. He said his message to politicians was "stop trying to overthrow the government and start working towards the real agenda." Provincial elections, he said, were the solution to many of Iraq's problems, because strong, representative provincial governments could "fill in the constitutional gaps" left by the central authority. Those currently trying to overthrow the government, he concluded, "are fools, terrorists, or working towards a foreign agenda."

¶6. (C) Despite this harsh stance Mashhadani was conciliatory towards the broader Sadr movement, explaining "I spent time with them in prison. I understand their mentality." The Sadrists, he explained, "want to be the equal of Badr. The conflict between Badr and Sadr is very old, and will not be

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resolved until there is a balance between the two" and they coexist "like two stallions in the same stable." He described the Sadrists as the most anti-Iranian of Shia groups and called them "the party of the street." Unfortunately, he noted, they do not have good leaders, because the core Sadrist leadership had all been killed by Saddam. The problem, Mashhadani said, is that the Sadrists continue to be neglected even as ISCI and Badr, supported by Iran, control the government and Abdel Aziz al-Hakim has "millions in his bank accounts in Paris and London." Everything the Sadrists do, he added, is a reaction against this neglect. Mashhadani said the solution was to give Sadrists their "rightful" positions within the government, including security posts, and target poor areas like Sadr City with reconstruction projects. Mashhadani pronounced it "strange" that Hakim can visit Washington despite his ties to Iran while the Sadrists remain isolated.

¶7. (C) Looking ahead towards the upcoming COR session, Mashhadani identified two sets of priorities: In the short-term, these were the elections law, the law regulating political parties, and COR relations with the UN. Longer-term priorities included the hydrocarbons law and the law regulating the composition of ministries. Mashhadani seemed impatient to receive a draft elections law - "If you get it to me, I'll make sure it passes" - but agreed that several political issues needed to be resolved to ensure the law was passed. He laughed with agreement when Polcouns noted that "many people do not understand what an open-list system means." Mashhadani was very receptive to assistance from the Constitutional and Legislative Affairs (CLA) unit but cautioned that any COR leadership meetings with UNAMI and elections advisors should be done collectively, rather than in individual sessions, to save time and reduce suspicion among COR members. Mashhadani also asked several times for U.S. assistance for an NGO that operates a "youth parliament."

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